Summary of Discussions in Seminar 2 – Indicators of wellbeing and their measurement/analysis

This seminar examined the measurement and analysis of wellbeing indicators within organisations.

Discussions around the papers presented included issues relating to the complexity of indicators – from the objective (e.g., not just looking at email volume but also at the number of attachments to emails requiring attention, the number and speed at which emails are responded to, who the sender and recipients are) to more subjective issues such as the context and content of those communications as well as individual preferences and differences in responses. Other points made included the idea of whether there might be a tipping point after which most people would find the volume of communications to be problematic (a point at which individual differences might be less influential).

The participants also talked about the need to develop a new ontology and methodology for Big Data research – which combines both quantitative/digitally captured data and subjective data which allows a deeper understanding of what the data actually means for the individuals involved. In the era of Big Data, qualitative research may be more important than ever, to help us understand what is going on behind the objective data.

Some learning points that arose from the discussions included:

- Scholars have an important role to play in Big Data analytics. There is a need to set the agenda and interpret Big Data using theory and using such data to help build knowledge. There is potential for such data to be used to help answer some of the complex questions that scholars ask, but we need to publicise this potential as well as the limitations of using such data and involve the public in deciding what such data is used for.
- We need to create Big Data methods for social science. It would be useful to have a central resource where all the methodological issues involved when considering Big Data are discussed and where the best techniques / methods that scholars are using in this area are examined. We need to build expertise so that more scholars know how to use this data appropriately.
- Access to Big Data could limit the questions we can ask. It might be easier to get access via individuals rather than via organisations e.g., via professional groups, unions or via social media. However, without access to organisational data it will be harder to address questions about what happens within organisations.